

Vision Screening in Schools
SB 1172 (Steinberg)
(As amended March 27, 2014)
Principal Co-Authors Assembly Members Buchanan and Gonzalez)

PURPOSE

SB 1172 is intended to ensure that vision screening of students in schools occurs in time to identify impairment that may be interfering with a child's ability to read and learn.

Currently, California school districts must provide screening for visual acuity (distance vision) for its students at the time of enrollment and at least every third year thereafter until the eighth grade. The screening must check for visual acuity from a distance and color vision for male children. Parents may waive the requirements by documenting that a physician or optometrist already has determined their child's visual acuity and/or color vision. However, the current law does not require screening for near vision and the current intervals may not capture this impairment at a time that is critical for a child to learn how to read.

SB 1172 adds near vision screening. A child's inability to see clearly up close could interfere with the ability to learn to read as well as use electronic learning devices that are becoming increasingly common in the elementary school setting. Near vision screening can be done at the same time and by the same professional, such as a school nurse, as distance screening. Due to the impact on reading ability and other learning skills, it is important to identify near vision deficits in the early years when the child is learning to read. Children with deficits

identified through screening will continue to be referred to medical professionals.

BACKGROUND

Research indicates that students who don't read well by the third grade are four times more likely to drop out of high school. Experts call third grade a critical turning point for learning and have found that if the child isn't reading proficient by third grade they are likely to fall behind not only in reading but in other subject areas. Although the research finds high correlation between socio-economic factors, such as poverty and lack of access to quality pre-K education, it also seems logical to assume that unidentified vision deficits such near vision deficits may be interfering with the child's ability to read prior to this critical third grade period.

SB 1172 stresses this early period and also ensures that vision issues are identified throughout the elementary school years by retaining the current every three year schedule. SB 1172 is based on the California Department of Education's (CDE) guidelines.

Screening for near vision deficit can be performed at the same time and by the same properly trained medical professional as is currently performed for distance vision—usually by a school nurse. According to guidelines established for vision screening in the State of Nebraska, this screening can be conducted smoothly and efficiently as a final

step in distance vision assessment, taking very little additional time and preparation and can be performed by the same licensed health professional such as a properly trained school nurse.

BILL SUMMARY

SB 1172 retains the first screening at time of enrollment, most likely kindergarten and revises the current law to conform to the CDE guidelines by revising the requirement to screen every third year and instead explicitly requiring the screenings at enrollment or entry, at kindergarten or first grade and in grades two, five and eight. SB 1172 also adds testing for near vision to the current testing that is done for far vision and color blindness.

SB 1172 also clarifies the role of the classroom teacher with regard to ongoing observation of a student's behavior and appraisal of a student's achievement with regard to potential vision deficits. According to the CDE guidelines, teacher observations

of children involved in classroom activities play a key role in detecting suspected vision problems. A plan for close and ongoing observation of students by the teacher and immediate referral of suspected vision problems to the school nurse may benefit a student's school performance.

SB 1172 requires CDE to adopt guidelines to ensure that properly trained personnel conduct the near vision screening at the same time as distance screening and that the methodology utilized is standardized and recognized by medical professionals.

SUPPORT

Pending

CONTACT

Marjorie Swartz, Principal Consultant
Phone: (916) 651-4170
Fax: (916) 323-2263
Email: Marjorie.swartz@sen.ca.gov